



Norway

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2001](#)

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Norway is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy with King Harald V as the Head of State. It is governed by a prime minister, cabinet, and a 165-seat Parliament (Storting) that is elected every 4 years through free and fair election; it cannot be dissolved. The judiciary is independent.

The national police have primary responsibility for internal security; however, in times of crisis, such as internal disorder or natural catastrophe, the police may call on the armed forces for assistance. In such circumstances, the armed forces are under police authority. The civilian authorities maintain effective control of the security forces.

The country has a population of approximately 4.5 million and is an advanced industrial state with a mixed economy combining private and public ownership that provides a high standard of living for residents. The per capita gross national product during the year was \$34,310 (312,197 Kroner). The key industries are oil and gas, metals, engineering, shipbuilding, fishing, and manufacturing (including fish processing equipment). The leading exports are oil and gas, manufactured goods, fish, and metals. In 2000 80.6 percent of workers were in the service sector, and 13.3 percent were in the manufacturing sector. During the year, 31.3 percent of workers were employed in the public sector. The economy is characterized by low unemployment and labor shortages in many sectors.

The Government generally respected the rights of its citizens, and the law and the judiciary provided effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. Violence against women and abuse of children existed. There were reports of trafficking in persons.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

In January police arrested five neo-Nazi's for the killing of an African boy; their trial began in December (See Section 5).

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

Prison conditions generally meet international standards. Men and women are held separately. Juveniles are

not held separately from adults; however, it is extremely rare for juveniles to be held in prison. Juveniles generally are cared for by social welfare authorities. Pretrial detainees are held separately from convicted prisoners.

The Government permits visits by independent human rights monitors, although there were no such visits during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observes these prohibitions; however, in the past, the Government has been criticized for its practice of indefinite detention, often in solitary confinement with restricted communications, for suspects during the investigation of criminal cases. Restrictions were used at times to pressure prisoners to be more cooperative during investigations.

In response to international criticism, the Government reevaluated its practices and made some changes. For example, in September 2000, the Government tightened the requirements for restricting communications and visitation rights of prisoners and detainees. In the spring, Parliament adopted a bill by the Ministry of Justice relating to the execution of sentence; among other provisions, the new law strengthens children's right of access to parents who are in prison.

The Government does not use forced exile.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respects this provision.

The court system consists of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court Appellate Court, superior courts, county courts for criminal cases, magistrate courts for civil cases, and claims courts. Special courts include the Impeachment Court (composed of parliamentarians), the labor court, trusteeship courts, fishery courts, and land ownership severance courts.

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforces this right. Courts provide counsel to the indigent.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution and the law prohibit such actions, the Government generally respects these prohibitions, and violations are subject to effective legal sanction.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respects these rights. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combine to ensure freedom of speech and of the press, including academic freedom.

There are 177 newspapers, 5 national television stations, and 6 national radio stations in the country. In addition there are numerous regional and local newspapers, and television and radio stations. Two television channels and five radio channels are state-owned. Access to the Internet is widely available and unrestricted.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for the freedoms of assembly and association, and the Government generally respects these rights.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right.

The state church is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, which is supported financially by the State and to which 87 percent of the population nominally belong. The Constitution requires that the King and one-half of the Cabinet belong to this church. There was increased public debate on the relationship between church and state during the year. Other denominations operate freely.

A religious community is required to register with the Government only if it desires state support, which is provided to all registered denominations on a proportional basis in accordance with membership.

In 1995 the Parliament introduced the subject "Religious Knowledge and Education in Ethics" into the national school system. The class covers all religions and religious philosophy and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs; however, Christianity receives the most coverage. All children must attend this mandatory class, and there are no exceptions for children of other faiths; on special grounds students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts such as church services or prayer, but they may not forgo instruction in the subject as a whole. Organizations for atheists as well as Muslim communities have contested the legality of forced religious teaching. During the year, the subject was evaluated by external education experts and a report was presented to Parliament. Based on the reports, Parliament concluded that steps should be taken to make it easier for parents to request that their children be exempted from parts of the class. In June the Parliament directed the Ministry of Education to draft a standard form for this purpose, which was sent to all schools. Schools were instructed to implement the use of the form. The Norwegian Humanist Association contested the teaching of this class in the courts on the grounds that it is a breach of freedom of religion and parents' right to make choices for their children. In August the Supreme Court unanimously rejected the claims from the association.

In 1998 the Government suspended two priests in the Church of Norway and asked the courts for approval legally to terminate their priesthood due to insubordination and disloyalty. The priests had refused openly to accept religious and spiritual guidance from their bishop, with whom they were in disagreement on a number of social issues. In January 2000, the Alta county court ruled that the two local priests could not be fired on charges of insubordination and disloyalty. The Minister of Church Affairs appealed the decision to the Haalogaland District Court. The Haalogaland District Court ruled against the two priests; one of the priests accepted the ruling and has left his position, but the other priest appealed his case to the Supreme Court. In 2000 the Supreme Court rejected the case.

The Workers' Protection and Working Environment Act permits prospective employers to ask applicants for employment in private or religious schools and day care centers whether they will respect and teach Christian beliefs and principles.

Muslims have encountered some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques in areas where they are concentrated. Since 1975 the town council in Drammen regularly has denied applications to build a mosque.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respects them.

The law provides for the granting of refugee and asylee status in accordance with the the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government cooperates with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The Government grants first asylum. In 2000 the Government granted protective residency (which entails the granting of permanent residence permits) to 8,231 persons. The total included: Political asylum for 97 persons; temporary collective residency permits for 2,019 Iraqi Kurds; individual residency permits for 2,856 persons; and asylum as U.N. quota refugees for 1,485 persons. Immigration authorities rejected 4,899 applications for protective residency. In addition 1,778 persons received residency status through a family reunification program.

The collective 1-year residency permits that were granted to Kosovar Albanians in 1999 expired in August 2000, and all members of this group were encouraged to return to Kosovo voluntarily. The Government gives financial aid for repatriation to all Kosovar Albanians who choose to do so. In 1999 the Government granted temporary collective protection and 1-year residence permits to 8,000 Kosovar Albanians, 1,500 of whom returned voluntarily to Kosovo in 2000. Of those who had returned to Kosovo, 1,200 came back to Norway as refugees later in 2000. Kosovar Albanians remaining in the country were required to apply for asylum, and most did; however, very few have met the requirements for asylum. At the beginning of the year, 4,500

Kosovar Albanians were awaiting the processing of their asylum applications. In October 2000, all Kosovar Albanian families with small children were granted postponed implementation of deportation based on advice from U.N. agencies, which noted that there was a lack of suitable winter housing in Kosovo.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercise this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

The percentage of women in government and politics does not correspond to their percentage of the population; however, women were increasingly well represented at all levels of government. No restrictions in law or practice hinder women's participation in government and politics. Women head 8 of the 19 government ministries (42 percent), hold 57 of the 165 seats in Parliament (34.5 percent), chair 5 of 15 standing committees in Parliament, and head 2 of the 6 main political parties.

In addition to participating freely in the national political process, the Norwegian Sami (formerly known as Lapps) elect their own constituent assembly, the Sameting. Under the law establishing the 39-seat body, the Sameting is a consultative group, which meets regularly to deal with "all matters, which in [its] opinion are of special importance to the Sami people." In practice the Sameting has been most interested in protecting the group's language and cultural rights and in influencing decisions on resources and lands where Sami are a majority.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups in general operate without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials are very cooperative and responsive to their views.

In 2000 the Prime Minister transferred the human rights portfolio from the Ministry of Development, Cooperation, and Human Rights to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and reversed the previous government's decision to appoint a minister for human rights issues. This change has not had any negative consequences. In 1999 the previous government presented a white paper to the Parliament on human rights, which addressed how the country can improve the state of human rights both domestically and internationally. In November 2000, the Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs supported the previous government's proposal and stressed the importance of incorporating human rights into law and society in general, and Parliament passed the white paper. It then was sent to the respective ministries for implementation.

Based on the principle that each cabinet minister is responsible for promoting human rights in his or her field, the Government established a separate committee of state secretaries to follow up on the plan of action for human rights contained in the White Paper that was debated by Parliament in 2000. The committee is responsible for ensuring that human rights issues receive political emphasis and attention. The parliamentary plan addresses political and civil rights and economic, social, and cultural rights. The plan comprises 325 projects and initiatives to improve the human rights situation in the country.

There is a parliamentary ombudsman for public administration who also is responsible for promoting human rights through his work on individual cases.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, religion, disability, language, or social status, and the Government generally enforced this prohibition in practice; however, violence and sexual harassment against women remained problems.

Women

Violence against women, including domestic violence, was a problem. During the year, 653 rapes were reported as compared to 555 in 2000. The police believe that increases in reported rapes and domestic abuse in recent years have been due largely to greater willingness among women to report these crimes. The police investigate and prosecute such crimes with vigor. In 2000 there were 25 convictions for rape. The average

prison sentence for rape in 2000 was 24 months. Police also have instituted special programs to prevent rape and domestic violence and to counsel victims. In 2000 a plan of action comprising measures to prevent domestic violence against women entered into force. The Government initiated a pilot project, including the establishment of the Resource Center for Assistance to Victims of Violent Crime, which is expected to continue until the end of 2002. Public and private organizations run several shelters that give battered women an alternative to returning to a violent domestic situation. Each of the country's 19 counties have a number of such shelters. In 2000 the country's shelters registered 44,498 overnight stays.

There were reports of trafficking in women for prostitution (see Section 6.f.).

The equal rights ombudsman processes complaints of sexual discrimination. In 2000 there were 266 complaints and 417 telephone inquiries to the ombudsman; women filed 50 percent of the complaints, men filed 25 percent, and organizations filed 25 percent. The ombudsman's office directly filed 24 cases.

An amendment to the Working Environment Act provides that "employees shall not be subjected to harassment or other unseemly behavior." Employers that violate these provisions, including the harassment clause, are subject to fines or prison sentences of up to 2 years, depending on the seriousness of the offense.

The law protects the rights of women. According to the law, "women and men engaged in the same activity shall have equal wages for work of equal value;" however, according to the equal rights ombudsman's office, which monitors enforcement of the law, women generally receive 10 to 15 percent less pay and benefits than men for work of "equal value."

Children

The Government is committed strongly to children's rights and welfare; it amply funds systems of education and medical care. The Government provides free education for children through the postsecondary level. Education is compulsory for 10 years, or through the ninth grade; most children stay in school at least until the age of 18. There is no difference in the treatment of girls and boys in education or health care services. An independent Children's Ombudsman Office, within the Ministry of Children and Families, is responsible for the protection of children under the law.

Abuse of children was a problem. During the year, 697 sexual assaults by nonfamily members and 120 assaults by family members were reported, compared to 191 reported sexual assaults on children by nonfamily members and 96 assaults by family members in 2000. Children's rights advocates have expressed concern that authorities have not pursued investigations in some legitimate cases of child abuse. The Government continued to examine this problem. In 2000 welfare services assisted 31,900 abused or neglected children; of these children, 6,147 were taken from their homes and placed in Government institutions or in respite homes.

Persons with Disabilities

There is no discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services. The law mandates access to public buildings for persons with disabilities, and the Government generally enforces these provisions in practice.

Indigenous People

The Government has taken steps to protect the cultural rights of the indigenous Sami by providing Sami language instruction at schools in their areas, radio and television programs broadcast or subtitled in Sami, and subsidies for newspapers and books oriented toward the Sami. A Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs deals specifically with Sami issues. The royal family has supported the Sami through their interest in Sami culture and by visiting Sami areas.

National/Racial/Minorities

In January a 15-year-old boy with an African father was killed in Oslo. Police arrested five neo-Nazis for the killing, which is believed to have been racially motivated; their trial began in December and was ongoing as year's end. The police closely monitor neo-Nazi groups. The killing received considerable attention in the media, and several antiracism associations mobilized marches and other demonstrations against racism a few days after the killing. In Oslo 40,000 persons marched, including politicians and members of the royal family. Other cities also organized public marches against racism. Authorities charged three young persons with aiding and abetting voluntary manslaughter for their role in the killing; all three were linked to a neo-nazi

organization. The case opened in Oslo City court in December.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides workers with the right to associate freely. With membership totaling approximately 60 percent of the workforce, unions play an important role in political and economic life, and the Government consults them on important economic and social problems. Although the largest trade union federation is associated with the Labor Party, all unions and labor federations are free of party and government control.

Workers have the right to strike; however, the Government has the right, with the approval of the Parliament, to invoke compulsory arbitration under certain circumstances. Compulsory arbitration was last invoked in 1995. There were no notable strikes during the year.

In 1995 the Supreme Court ruled that rules on compulsory arbitration do not violate international commitments; the case was under appeal in the international court of human rights in Strasbourg at year's end.

A Government-appointed committee with representatives from all employer organizations and employee unions--created to examine the practice of using compulsory arbitration in especially difficult labor conflicts--presented its proposal on April 1. Its main proposition was to introduce a mechanism to require employee unions to vote on solutions offered by the arbitration tribunal in order to reach agreements in wage negotiations. The major unions have all rejected the proposal.

Unions are free to form federations and to affiliate internationally; unions maintain strong ties with such international bodies as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

All workers, including government employees and military personnel, have and exercise the right to organize and bargain collectively. Collective bargaining is widespread, and most wage earners are covered by negotiated settlements, either directly or through understandings that extend the contract terms to workers outside the main labor federation and the employers' bargaining group.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. The Labor Court deals with complaints of antiunion discrimination; however, there were no such complaints during the year.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor; however, there were reports of trafficking in women (see Section 6.f.). The Directorate of Labor Inspections (DLI) is responsible for compliance with the law.

The Government prohibits forced and bonded labor by children, and in general it is not known to occur; however, there have been reports of children being trafficked into the country (See Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

Children 13 to 18 years of age may be employed part-time in light work that will not affect adversely their health, development, or schooling. Minimum age rules are observed in practice and enforced by the DLI.

The Government prohibits forced and bonded labor by children, and in general it is not known to occur; however, there have been reports of children being trafficked into the country (See Section 6.f.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no specified minimum wage, but wages normally fall within a national scale negotiated by labor, employers, and the Government. The Government changed the wage negotiating process in 1996, shifting negotiations from the national to the local and company level. The average income, not including extensive

social benefits, provides a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

Normal working hours are mandated by law and limited to 37 1/2 hours per week. The law also provides for 25 working days of paid leave per year (31 days for those over age 60). A 28-hour rest period is mandated legally on weekends and holidays.

The law provides for safe and physically acceptable working conditions for all employed persons. Specific standards are set by the DLI in consultation with nongovernmental experts. According to the law, environment committees composed of management, workers, and health personnel must be established in all enterprises with 50 or more workers, and safety delegates must be elected in all organizations. Workers have the right to remove themselves from situations that endanger their health. The DLI effectively monitors compliance with labor legislation and standards.

f. Trafficking in Persons

No law specifically criminalizes trafficking in persons, although existing labor and immigration statutes may be used to prosecute trafficking cases; however, although such cases are rare, Norway is a destination for women trafficked for the purpose of prostitution, particularly from Russia, according to a 1999 OSCE report. There also have been occasional reports of children from Russia being trafficked into the country to work in petty theft rings.

Cases of possible trafficking generally may be prosecuted under general laws concerning labor, indentured servitude, immigration, and sexual assault; however, there were no prosecutions for such offenses during the year. Immigration and law enforcement authorities have begun to pay attention to the problem of trafficking. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs coordinates an interministerial working group, which has developed a plan of action to combat trafficking. The working group also is responsible for implementing resolutions and recommendations from the U.N. and the European Council on trafficking. During the year, the working group published a report on government measures to combat trafficking.

Victims of trafficking in the country had the same legal rights as other foreigners to apply for residency, asylum, welfare, social aid, and emergency health care. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs is responsible for assisting possible victims of trafficking; however, most asylum requests by victims have been denied.